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ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ
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01.08.2011 - 31.07.2013



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Education and Culture DG
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Spring Holidays n Romania

Mărțișor



Mărțișor (Romanian pronunciation: [mərtsiʃor]) is an old Romanian celebration at the beginning of spring, on March the 1st, which according to old calendar was also considered as the beginning of the new year. Symbolically, it is correlated to women and to fertility as a means of life and continuity. The tradition is authentic in Romania, Moldova, and all territories inhabited by Romanians and Aromanians. Alike though not identical customs can be found in Bulgaria (see Martenitsa), while similar ones exist in Albania, Greece and Italy.

The name *Mărțișor* is the diminutive of *marț*, the old folk name for March (*Martie*, in modern Romanian), and thus literally means "little March". It is also the folk name for this month.

Mărțișor, *marț* and *mărțișuș* are all names for the red and white string from which a small decoration is tied, and which is offered by people on the 1st day of March. The string can also be black and white, or blue and white). Giving this talisman to people is an old custom, and it is believed that the one who wears the red and white string will be strong and healthy for the year to come. It is also a symbol of the coming spring. Usually, women wear it pinned to their clothes for the first 12 days of the month, until other spring celebrations, or until the bloom of certain fruit-trees. In some regions, a gold or



silver coin hangs on the string, which is worn around the neck. After wearing it for a certain period of time, they buy red wine and sweet cheese with the coin, according to a belief that their faces would remain beautiful and white as cheese, and rubicund as the red wine, for the entire year.

In modern times, and especially in urban areas, the *Mărțișor* lost most of its talisman properties and became more of a symbol of friendship or love, appreciation and respect. The black threads were replaced with red, but the delicate wool ropes are

still a 'cottage industry' among people in the countryside, who comb out the wool, dye the floss, and twist it into thousands of tassels. In some areas the amulets are still made with black and white ropes, for warding off evil.

Some ethnologists consider Mărțișor to have a Roman origin, while others believe it to have a Daco-Thracian origin. In ancient Rome, New Year's Eve was celebrated on March 1 - 'Martius', as the month was called in the honour of the god Mars. Mars was not only the god of war but also an agricultural guardian, who ensured nature's rebirth. Therefore, the red and white colours of Mărțișor may be explained as colours of war and peace.

The Thracians also used to celebrate the New Year's Eve on the first day of March, a month which took the name of the god Marsyas Silen, the inventor of the pipe (fluiet, traditional musical instrument), whose cult was related to the land and vegetation. Thracian spring celebrations, connected to fertility and the rebirth of nature, were consecrated to him. In some areas, Daco-Romanians still celebrate the agrarian New Year in spring, where the first days of March are considered days of a new beginning. Before March 1, women choose one day from the first nine of the month, and judging by the weather on the chosen day, they would know how the new year will go for them. Similarly, in other areas, young men find out what their wives are going to be like. The first 9 days of March are called Baba Dochia's Days, Baba Dochia being an image of the Great Earth Goddess. The tradition says that you must pick a day from 1 to 9 March, and how the weather in that day will be, so it will be for you all year long. Initially, the Mărțișor string used to be called the *Year's Rope* ('funia anului', in Romanian), made by black and white wool threads, representing the 365 days of the year. "The Year's Rope" was the link between summer and winter, black and white representing the opposition but also the unity of the contraries: light and dark, warm and cold, life and death. The "Mărțișor" is the thread of the days in the year, spun by Baba Dochia (the Old Dochia), or the thread of one's life, spun at birth by the Fates (Ursitoare). White is the symbol of purity, the sum of all the colours, the light, while Black is the colour of origins, of distinction, of fecundation and fertility, the colour of fertile soil. White is the sky, the Father, while black is the mother of all, Mother Earth.

According to ancient Roman tradition, the ides of March was the perfect time to embark on military campaigns. In this context, it is believed that the red string of Mărțișor signifies vitality, while the white one is the symbol of victory. Red is the colour of fire, blood, and a symbol of life, associated with the passion of women. Meanwhile, white is the colour of snow, clouds, and the wisdom of men. In this interpretation, the thread of a Mărțișor represents the union of the feminine and the masculine principles, the vital forces which give birth to the eternal cycle of the nature. Red and white are also complementary colours present in many key traditions of Daco-Romanian folklore.

George Coșbuc stated that Mărțișor is a symbol of fire and light, and of the Sun. Not only the colours, but also the traditional silver coin hung from the thread are associated with the sun. White, the colour of silver, is also a symbol of power and strength. The round form of the coin is also reminiscent of the Sun, while silver is associated with the Moon. These are just a few of the reasons why the Mărțișor is a sacred amulet.

In Daco-Romanian folklore, seasons are attributed symbolic colours: spring is red, summer is green or yellow, autumn is black, and winter is white. This is why one can also say that the Mărțișor thread, knitted in white and red, is a symbol of passing, from the cold white winter, to the lively spring, associated with fire and life.

Women's Day

International Women's Day (IWD), originally called International Working



Women's Day, is marked on **March 8** every year. In different regions the focus of the celebrations ranges from general celebration of respect, appreciation and love towards women to a celebration for women's economic, political and social achievements. Started as a Socialist political event, the holiday blended in the culture of the country. The day lost its political flavour, and became simply an occasion for men to express their love for women in a way somewhat similar to a mixture of Mother's Day and Valentine's Day. Nowadays it is a celebration honouring mothers and celebrating motherhood, maternal bonds and the influence of mothers in society.

Easter



Easter is celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm throughout the world. On the occasion of Easter, the Christian community presents in every nook and corner of the world celebrates this day as the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ after crucifixion. The celebration of Easter is marked by morning services at the church and feasting and party in the evening. In almost all the countries around the world, the festivities of Easter are more or less the same. However, certain specific traditions of the place make the Easter at a particular country stand a little different from the other. Here in this article we have explored the Easter celebrations in Romania. Easter in Romania is celebrated according to the rituals of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Easter entire season consists of Flowers Saturday (Lazarus' Saturday), Palm Day (Flowers Day), Great Thursday, Great Friday, Easter, The Small Fountain and Good People's Easter. Each of these has small interesting rituals. The Easter celebration goes on for a long week and finally wraps with Good People's Easter celebrated in honor of the ancient spirits. The Friday before the Easter is called the Great Friday or the Friday of sufferings, as it is the day when Jesus was crucified. On Saturday, people go to church for the midnight mass, taking with them a bowl of Pasca, eggs and steak, where these aliments are blessed by the clergy. On returning home from the mass, people first eat some of the sanctified aliments and only then the rest.



Starting with Holy Thursday, people start painting eggs in a multitude of colors. The predominant color is red, but other colors are also applied - yellow, green, blue and even black. Decorated eggs or 'oua incondeiate' are an integral part of Easter celebration in Romania. The eggs are decorated using a type of thin and round sticks called chisita, made of beech wood.

The special Easter cake, known as Pasca, is baked on Great Thursday. The Pasca can have a round shape (reminding little Jesus' diapers) or a rectangular one (the shape of his grave). The shells of the eggs used for the Pasca are thrown in a river. This action stems from the ancient belief that the shells are taken by the river to the country of the Good People, announcing them the Easter has come.

In some regions (Bucovina, Transylvania), there is a tradition called "the wetting". On Monday morning, the boys take a bucket of water and go to the houses of the unmarried girls. If they found them sleeping, the boys throw water on them. As it is believed that those girls will marry soon, they reward the boys who had wetted them by giving them the most beautiful decorated eggs and Pasca or cake.



Labour Day

Labour Day or Labor Day is an annual holiday to celebrate the economic and social achievements of workers. Labour Day has its origins in the labour union movement, specifically the eight-hour day movement, which advocated eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest. It is a national holiday for workers.

The history of the holiday is associated with the international socialist movement in the 19th century workers' protests and respect for basic social rights. Initiated on May 1, 1886 in the U.S., where unions held an informal nationwide strike, which involved over 300,000 workers across the country requesting the introduction of the official 8-hour workday. After three days of protests in Chicago police and private security guards dispersed the protesters, injuring about 200 people and killed at least four. On May 4, during the ensuing protest against police brutality among police dropped a bomb in which a policeman was killed and six injured. Hastily convicted and executed were seven anarchists, subsequently acquitted as innocent.

In 1889 the founding congress of the Second International, held in Paris called for



international demonstrations in solidarity protests in Chicago. In 1904 the Socialist International Conference in Amsterdam calls "all social democratic parties and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on May homologation of 8-hour day for world peace." Since the most effective way of demonstrations, strikes, Congress decided it was "mandatory for all proletarian organizations of all countries to stop work on May 1, wherever possible without adverse effects on workers."

Spring Holidays in Italy



May in Italy is a good time to find spring festivals. You will find flower festivals, food and wine festivals, medieval reenactments, and events celebrating rituals of spring. Although you'll probably come across other local festivals, here are some of the highlights.

May Day, May 1, is a **public holiday** all over Italy as the day of the worker. Many services will be closed but you may find interesting parades and festivals to celebrate the day. Expect big crowds

in popular Italian tourist destinations.

John Paul II Beatification Ceremony is May 1, 2011, and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims are expected to flock to Rome and Vatican City so expect huge crowds if you're going to Rome.



The Sagra di Sant'Efisio on May 1 one of the most important festivals in Sardinia. A colorful 4-day procession leads from Cagliari to the Romanesque church of Saint Efisio on the beach at Nora. Decorated ox carts and horsemen accompany the saint's statue in a parade followed by food and dancing.

Ring Race and Procession, re-enactments of 14th century contests and parades, continues in *Narni* in the Umbria region through May 12 (starts near the end of April).



Calendimaggio is celebrated in early May in Assisi, Umbria. The festival is recommended by Manuela of Italian Ceramics who says - It is a spectacular evocation of Medieval and Renaissance costumes and life. The two ancient medieval wards, the "Parte di Sopra" and the "Parte di Sotto", engage in a spectacular challenge which takes the form of theatre shows, concerts, songs and choruses, dances, processions, archery, crossbow and flag-waving displays. The districts compete in a singing contest

among the spectacular floral decorations, flags, torches and candles. 2009 dates are May 7-9.



The Risotto Festival the first Sunday in May in the Piedmont town of *Sessame* is a huge feast of a special rice dish dating back to the 13th century.



flowers and new trees are planted while everyone enjoys a free picnic lunch. The ceremony revives Vetralla's sovereignty over the forests and continues the right of each citizen to a cubic meter of firewood annually.



The Snake Handlers' Procession is the first Thursday in May in *Cocullo* in the Abruzzo region. A statue of *St. Dominic*, the town's patron saint, is carried through town covered with live serpents.

The Wedding of the Trees, *Sposalizio dell'Albero*, takes place May 8 in the northern Lazio town of *Vetralla*. A couple of oak trees are decorated with garlands, horsemen offer bouquets of the first spring

Giro d'Italia, Italy's big bike race similar to the Tour d'France, starts in early May and lasts most of the month. The race takes in scenic countryside and it's fine to watch a leg or two.

La Palombella, in Orvieto, is a festival representing the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. The festival is held on Pentecost Sunday in the piazza in front of the duomo and ends with a fireworks display. The 2010 date is May 23.

The Fish festival of Saint Fortunato, patron saint of fishermen, is celebrated in the beautiful fishing village of *Camogli*, south of Genoa, the second Sunday in May. Saturday night there is a huge fireworks display and bonfire competition followed by free fried fish on Sunday.



Polenta Festival, also the second Sunday in May, is celebrated in the main square of the Piedmont town of *Avigliana*.

La Barabbata is celebrated May 14 in *Marta* on the shores of Lake Bolsena. In this procession, men wear costumes representing the old trades and carry their tools while white buffalo pull floats carrying the fruits of the trades.

The Festa dei Ceri, a candle race and costumed parade in *Gubbio* takes place May 15 and is followed by a **Historical Cross-Bow Exhibition** on the last Sunday of May. Festa dei Ceri on Italian Notebook

St. Rita's Procession and Candle Festival is May 21-22 in *Cascia* in Umbria.

Infiorata di Noto, a huge festival with flower petal art displays and a parade, takes place in Noto, Sicily, the third weekend of May. Read more about the Infiorata di Noto on Europe Travel.

The Flower Festival of *Bucchianico* in the Abruzzo includes a re-enactment of a 13th-century military stratagem with a parade, the third Sunday in May.

Pinocchio's Birthday is celebrated May 25 in the Tuscan town of *Pescia*.



Il Palio di Ferrara, a historical horse race dating from 1279, is run the last Sunday in May. There are parades, flag throwing contests, and other events every weekend in May including a historical procession to the castle with over 1000 people in Renaissance costumes on the Saturday night of the weekend before the race.

Cantine Aperte, open cantinas, is a big wine celebration throughout Italy the last weekend of May. Many cantine or wineries are open to guests and have special events.



Roman Fest is a 3-day re-enactment of a typical ancient Roman festival in the Piedmont town of *Alesandria*, the last weekend of May. The festival includes parades, feasts, staged gladiator combat and chariot races.

The Chianti Wine Festival, the last Sunday in May and first Sunday in June, takes place in *Montespertoli* in the Chianti wine region of Tuscany.

Medieval Parade and Jousting Tournament in the Emilia Romagna region town of *Grazzano Visconti* is the last Sunday in May.

The Daffodil Festival in the Abruzzo town of *Rocca di Mezzo* celebrates spring with folk dancing and a parade the last Sunday in May.



Easter



Most of the Italian population is a follower of Christianity so all of the Christian festivals like Christmas, Easter and Good Friday are observed here in almost all the families. Easter, one of the major festivals of Christians is also held in high regard in the country and celebrated with great gusto. As this day is celebrated in order to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus' after crucifixion, this day is considered to be very holy and auspicious. Though you may miss the Easter bunny in the Easter celebrations of Italy, there are many other rituals that will keep your pre-occupied in the Easter celebrations at Italy. Read on to explore more about the Easter celebrations in Italy.

The deep influence of tradition and ritual in Italian culture is reflected in celebrations such as Easter. Known as La Pasqua, Easter celebration in Italy is marked by many rites observed throughout the country that have their roots in ancient pagan rituals. The Holy Week



celebrations across Italy reflect regional differences, and are remnants of religion, peasant lore and pagan influences. On Palm Sunday, the churches are bedecked with baskets of palms and olive branches and once they have been blessed by the priest they are given out to the congregations. Thousands of people throng the St. Peters Square on Palm Sunday to receive the palms blessed by the Pope after Mass has ended. On Giovedi Santo or Holy Friday, many churches re-enact the ceremony of the washing of the feet at the altar. Among the myriad of

Easter traditions in Italy, Scoppio del Carro, meaning explosion of the cart, is the most spectacular one. For over 300 years the Easter celebration in Florence has included this ritual, during which an elaborate wagon, a structure built in 1679 and standing two to three stories high, is dragged through Florence behind a fleet of white oxen decorated in garlands. Like in many other countries, in Italy the fasting of Lent is preceded by a carnival with colorful pageants, masquerades, dancing, music and all kinds of merrymaking.

The Carnevale begins in January and lasts until Ash Wednesday. The activities and merriment of Carnevale precede the somber overtones of the Lenten season. The Easter dinner is usually a sumptuous feast arranged with special delicacies. The most important dish is Agnellino, roasted baby lamb. Eggs feature prominently in the day's dishes, in both soups such as Brodetto Pasquale, a broth-based Easter soup thickened with eggs, and various kinds of breads, both sweet and savory.



Pannetone and Colomba (dove shaped) breads are also given as gifts. Hollow chocolate eggs that usually contain something surprising inside are also presented to near and dear ones. Gifts exchange in various other forms is also popular in Italy.

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